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imagery analysis report

## **Military Facilities in Nicaragua (S)**

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## MILITARY FACILITIES IN NICARAGUA (S)

### OVERVIEW

1. (S/D) On [ ] the civil war in Nicaragua ended and the National Reconstruction Government was established under the guidance of the Sandinista National Liberation Front. This report summarizes military activity and Cuban/Soviet influence observed in Nicaragua from July 1979 through January 1981 and includes two maps, two tables, and 18 annotated photographs.

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2. (S/D) This report is in two sections. The first section is a summary of military activity, Cuban/Soviet involvement, and patterns or trends which are evolving; the second section includes a discussion and description of each military facility.

### INTRODUCTION

3. (S/D) The National Reconstruction Government (GRN) of Nicaragua, under the guidance of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), assumed power in July 1979 after a lengthy civil war and the collapse of the Somoza regime. Somoza's National Guard, many members of which fled north across the Honduran border, was replaced by the Sandinista Popular Army (EPS). The EPS with Cuban/Soviet assistance has been expanding its military capabilities through the improvement and construction of military installations and through the addition of weapons and equipment from mostly Soviet or Eastern Bloc manufacturers to its inventory.

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### SUMMARY

5. (S/D) Fourteen military installations have been identified in Nicaragua (Figure 2 and Table 1). Jiloa Military Training Facility, Villanueva Military Barracks Area, Matagalpa Military Barracks Area, and Condega Military Camp were totally new facilities still under construction; Managua Army Barracks and Headquarters Tiscapa Northeast, Managua Army Barracks Xolotlan, Las Mercedes (Sandino) Airfield, Lake Managua Training Area, and Puerto Cabezas Airfield and Military Camp were existing facilities that were being upgraded; Montelimar Airfield and El Regate Military Camp have been converted from former estates; Ocotal Military Camp has been converted from a formerly nonmilitary area; and Papalonal Airfield was being converted from an agricultural airstrip to a military airfield.

6. (S/D) The most extensive construction was underway at the six installations across the northern third of Nicaragua—El Regate, Villanueva, Matagalpa, Condega, Ocotal, and Puerto Cabezas. This construction was underway by April or May 1980 and was significant in light of the perceived threat of counterrevolutionary activity originating in Honduras from former National Guard members.

7. (S/D) Emphasis on infantry and artillery training and Cuban/Soviet influence were apparent in the number and type of training areas being constructed throughout the country. These training areas, none of which existed prior to January 1980, are patterned on Cuban/Soviet models and include Soviet-style type A obstacle courses, physical training areas, artillery miniature ranges, firing ranges, and a tank miniature firing range. Table 2 lists the military installations and the training areas observed at each.

8. (S/D) An increased military capability, expanded with Cuban/Soviet support, was also apparent in the addition of weapons and equipment to the EPS inventory. Soviet-manufactured ZPU-4 heavy machineguns, 57mm ZIS-2 antitank guns, light machineguns, probable 120mm mortars, and East German-manufactured W-50 trucks have been observed at various facilities since March 1980.

9. (S/D) To date, anti-aircraft (AA) defense has been the most frequently observed activity involving newly introduced weapons. The construction timetable of eight AA sites currently completed coincides with the construction of new facilities which began in the April or May time period. The first AA site, observed at Montelimar, was constructed and occupied by early April, and construction on three AA sites at Sandino Airfield and one AA site at Managua Army Barracks Tiscapa began in May. By October, AA sites had been constructed and occupied at two of the new facilities under construction—Villanueva and Condega. The eighth AA site was observed at Puerto Cabezas in November.

### DESCRIPTION

#### Montelimar Airfield

10. (S/D) Montelimar Airfield (Figure 3) is on the Pacific coast, 25 nautical miles (nm) southwest of Managua. The approximately 2,000-meter asphalt runway and the estate adjacent to the west end existed prior to the revolution. A military association was first indicated in mid-October 1979 when the letters EPS were observed painted on the runway. Conversion of the estate complex began in March 1980 with the addition of

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three large vehicle/equipment sheds and clearing of the area that would later be used for training facilities. An AA site, the first observed in Nicaragua, was under construction by late March and occupied by ZPU-4 guns by April. In mid-April, personnel were observed in AA exercises.

11. (S/D) From early June to mid-July, intense activity was in progress to prepare for the first anniversary of the revolution; this celebration was held on [ ] in Managua. Tents were erected, and W-50 trucks and artillery were assembled for parade formation practice on the runway which had been marked with white lines for this purpose (Figure 4). The number of pieces of equipment involved varied, but a high count of 113 W-50 trucks and 80 assorted artillery pieces was observed. In addition, 22 tents were observed during most of this period.

12. (S/D) In September, a deployed battery of 57mm ZIS-2 antitank guns was identified in the vehicle park; a reviewing stand was observed on the runway; an AA site occupied with ZPU-4 guns was constructed adjacent to the original site which is no longer in use; and training facilities including a Soviet-style type A obstacle course, an artillery miniature range, and defensive trenches and positions were constructed (Figure 5).

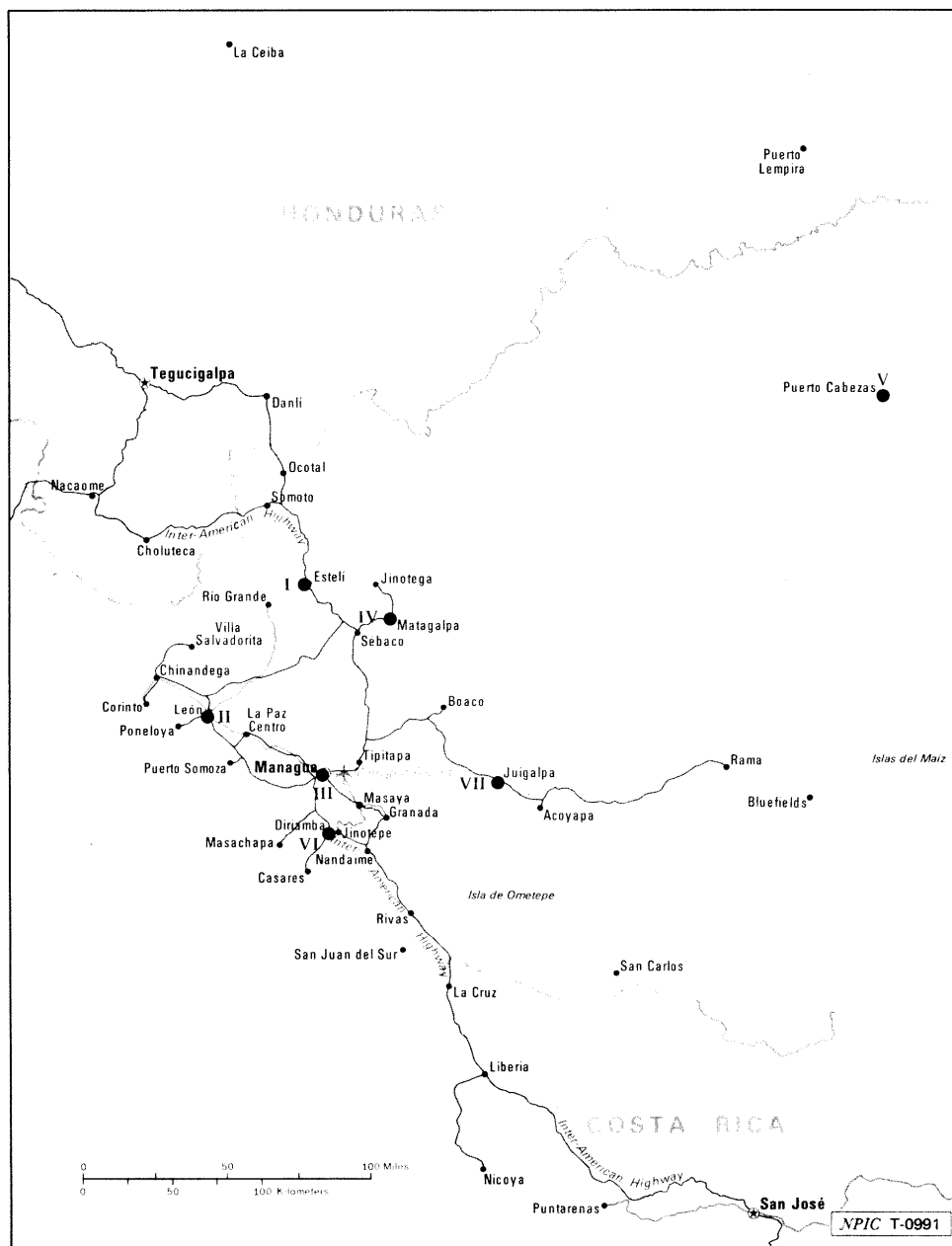


FIGURE 1. LOCATIONS OF MILITARY REGION HEADQUARTERS, NICARAGUA

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13. (S/D) Training exercises were observed during November and December 1980 and January 1981. By mid-December, the number of W-50 trucks usually present in the vehicle park had increased to at least 18, and by late January, four batteries of antitank guns were present. No aircraft have been observed since before the revolution, although the runway appeared to be in good condition.

14. (S/D) More activity has been observed at this facility than at any other in Nicaragua. A six-position AA site, ZPU-4 heavy machineguns, 57mm ZIS-2 antitank guns, and W-50 trucks were first observed here. In addition, the first AA training exercises and the only antitank gun exercises have taken place here. This pattern of activity leads to the conclusion that Montelimar is the primary training facility in Nicaragua, and that, as with AA units, artillery units will soon be seen at other facilities.

#### Managua Army Barracks and Headquarters Tiscapa Northeast

15. (S/D) Managua Army Barracks and Headquarters Tiscapa Northeast is immediately north of Lake Tiscapa in the center of Managua (Figure 6). This facility, National Guard headquarters during the

Somoza regime, is apparently the headquarters of the EPS. Numerous vehicle/equipment sheds, barracks, support buildings, and a training area are around the headquarters/administration building. Perimeter fences and at least eight guardposts and barricades control access. In the training area, a Soviet-style, type A obstacle course, the first to be constructed in Nicaragua, was begun in January 1980, and a physical training area and three Soviet-style training grids were later added. In May, construction began on an AA site on a bluff above the lake. By July, the site was occupied by six ZPU-4 guns. Other military equipment and weapons observed included Staghound armored cars and a probable M-4 tank—leftovers from the Somoza National Guard—and W-50 trucks.

#### Managua Army Barracks Xolotlan

16. (S/D) Managua Army Barracks Xolotlan (Figure 7) is a former National Guard facility in an urban/industrial area of northeast Managua. It consists of two probable administration buildings, five probable barracks, five vehicle/equipment sheds, 14 support buildings, and a guardhouse at the main entrance.

17. (S/D) Little change was apparent until early May 1980, when cleanup operations were observed in progress. During June, a basketball court and elements of a Soviet-style type A obstacle course were constructed in the center of the facility. The obstacle course is rectangular rather than linear, probably because of space limitations. Personnel and miscellaneous trucks and cars have been observed, but no military equipment or weapons have been seen. The relatively small size, lack of room for expansion, and limited training facilities may indicate reserve or militia status.

**Table 1.**  
Military Installations in Nicaragua (Items keyed to Figure 2)

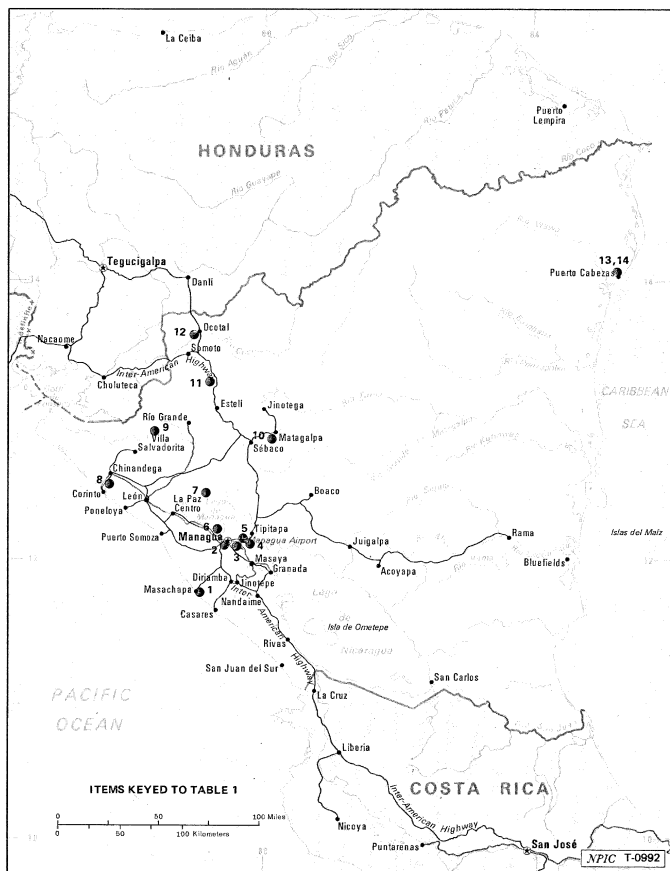
*This table in its entirety is classified SECRET//WNINTEL*

Item	Installation Name	BE No
1	Montelimar Airfield	
2	Managua Army Barracks and Headquarters Tiscapa Northeast	
3	Managua Army Barracks Xolotlan	
4	Las Mercedes (Sandino) Airfield	
5	Lake Managua Training Area	
6	Jiloa Military Training Facility	
7	Papalonal Airfield	
8	El Regate Military Camp	
9	Villanueva Military Barracks Area	
10	Matagalpa Military Barracks Area	
11	Condega Military Camp	
12	Ocotol Military Camp	
13	Puerto Cabezas Airfield	
14	Puerto Cabezas Military Camp	

**Table 2.**  
Training Areas at Installations in Nicaragua

*This table in its entirety is classified SECRET//WNINTEL*

Installation	Obstacle Course	PT Area	Artillery Min Range	Firing Range	Tank Min Range
Condega Mil Camp	X	X	X	X	
El Regate Mil Camp	X	X	X	X	
Jiloa Mil Tng Fac	X			X	
Lake Managua Tng Area				X	X
Las Mercedes (Sandino) Afl	X	X			
Managua Army Bks & Hq Tiscapa NE	X	X			
Managua Army Bks Xolotlan	X				
Montelimar Afl	X		X		
Ocotol Mil Camp	X				
Puerto Cabezas Mil Camp	X				
Villanueva Mil Bks Area	X	X	X	X	



**FIGURE 2. MILITARY INSTALLATIONS IN NICARAGUA**

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**Las Mercedes (Sandino) Airfield**

18. (S/D) Las Mercedes Airfield, renamed Sandino after the revolution, is on the east side of Managua (Figure 8). It is Nicaragua's only international airfield, as well as the headquarters for the Nicaraguan Air Force. The east/west asphalt runway is approximately 2,500 meters long and is connected to a parallel taxiway by three crossover links. All facilities are on the north side of the runway and consist of three areas—the commercial/international area, the cargo/Lanica (Nicaragua's national airline) area, and the military area.

19. (S/D) Numerous Soviet and Cuban flights have been observed at the commercial or cargo areas. The unusually high number observed in mid-July 1980 was related to the first anniversary celebration of the revolution.

20. (S/D) Aircraft regularly observed at the cargo/Lanica area include one C-47, two C-46, and two DC-6. A CL-44 swingtail airliner/freighter, probably Nicaraguan, has been observed in this area on six occasions—the first time in September 1980 and later in November and December.

21. (S/D) The military area at the west end of the airfield (Figure 9) includes hangars, an aircraft parking area, and a barracks and training area. The military aircraft were nearly all leftovers from the Somoza era and were old. For several months after the civil war, some of the aircraft were irregularly parked at the far west end, apparently damaged or in disrepair. Recently, however, these aircraft have either been removed or been parked with the operational aircraft. The current military aircraft inventory is as follows:

Type	Quantity	Type	Quantity
C-47	4-5	DHC-2 Beaver	1
Casa Aviocar	2	T-41 Mescalero	3
B-26 Invader	3	T-34 Mentor	1
Arava	1	T-42 Baron	1
T-33 Tee Bird	5	PA-28 Cherokee	1
U-4 Aerocommander	2	Twin-engine Cessna	Several
T-28 Trojan	4	UH-1 helicopter	2
O-2 Skymaster	4	S-58 helicopter	3

22. (S/D) At the barracks and training area, construction of a Soviet-style type A obstacle course and physical training area began in October 1980. By late December, sawtooth trenches had been added west of the hangars; by late January 1981, ten circular areas of various sizes and unknown function had been cleared.

23. (S/D) Other activity observed at Sandino included the development of an AA defense capability. Construction of permanent AA sites and barracks/support buildings began in May 1980, and by August, three six-position AA sites, each occupied by ZPU-4 guns, were completed. One is south of the runway near the west end, the second is south of the runway near the east end, and the third is across the highway in a field north of the center of the runway.

24. (S/D) AA training exercises involving as many as five batteries were observed during July 1980 in an open area north of the east end of the runway. On  seven W-50 trucks, six batteries of ZPU-4 guns, and one battery of probable 120mm mortars were aligned in this area after participating in the anniversary parade the day before. By late July, after additional training exercises, some of the units appeared to be preparing to leave. A few of the AA guns and probable mortars remained in this area until early November.

25. (S/D) The entire area northeast of the runway may become a military facility. Before the revolution, it appeared to be an industrial/warehouse area; however, fence changes and an increase in trenches during November and December indicated a functional change in this area.

**Lake Managua Training Area**

26. (S/D) Lake Managua Training Area (Figure 10) is on the shore of Lake Managua, 1.5 nm north of Sandino Airfield. During the Somoza regime, this area was used as a small-arms firing range. Clearing for the present facility began in October 1979, and a Soviet-style tank miniature firing range was identified in May 1980. A firing range with an observation tower and a grenade range have been added since that time. Five scout cars, possibly Staghounds left after the collapse of the National Guard, were at the tank miniature firing range in mid-September, the first time the facility was observed in use.

**Jiloa Military Training Facility**

27. (S/D) Jiloa Military Training Facility (Figure 11) is 4 nm north of Managua on the Chiltepe Peninsula. It consists of three buildings in a C configuration around an open courtyard, one open-bay vehicle/equipment shed, two small support buildings, a probable communications control building with a probable horizontal dipole antenna, a firing range with an observation tower, and a Soviet-style type A obstacle course. A guardhouse is at the main entrance.

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28. (S/D) Equipment observed includes at least eight probable W-50 trucks and unidentified objects projecting from the vehicle/equipment shed.

### Papalonal Airfield

29. (S/D) Papalonal Airfield (Figure 12) is in a remote area 23 nm north/northwest of Managua. By ground, the airfield is accessible only by dirt roads. In late July 1980, the airfield was an agricultural dirt airstrip approximately 800 meters long. By mid-December, the length had been increased by 50 percent to approximately 1,200 meters; a turnaround had been added to each end; a dispersal parking area with three hardstands—a feature typical of a military airfield—had been constructed at the west end of the runway; three parking aprons had been cleared; and three hangar/storage buildings, each approximately 15 meters wide, had been constructed on one of the aprons. Since mid-December, three more hangars and two support buildings have been added, and future additions were indicated.

30. (S/D) On [REDACTED] one C-47 aircraft was observed on the center parking apron, and on [REDACTED] two C-47 aircraft were present. A canvas cover was draped over the engines and center fuselage section of the aircraft present on [REDACTED]

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31. (S/D) This airfield is reportedly a transshipment point for arms destined for guerillas in El Salvador.<sup>4</sup> Although no direct confirmation has been observed, the speed with which this airfield was upgraded, the type of improvements, the observed aircraft, and the location lend support to this possibility.

### El Regate Military Camp

32. (S/D) A former estate (Figure 13) was in the process of being converted to El Regate Military Camp (Figure 14), 2 nm southwest of Chinandega. The original large house and nearby support buildings appeared to be unchanged externally; however, one support building has been added just west of the house, a small support building has been added west of the swimming pool, one of the two tennis courts has been converted into a basketball court, and the circular drive in front of the house has been improved. The complex, which is in the center of the facility, is now probably an administration/headquarters area.

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33. (S/D) A Soviet-style type A obstacle course; a physical training area; an infantry training area; an artillery miniature range; and two arms firing ranges (Figure 14) have been constructed in the fields surrounding the central complex since conversion began in May 1980. Two long, narrow barracks or classroom buildings have been built southeast of the central complex, and a separately secured vehicle park was under construction at the northwest edge of the complex. One of two vehicle/equipment sheds was not yet complete. Although no weapons or equipment other than a few trucks have been observed, personnel have been observed in some of the training areas.

34. (S/D) This facility is strategically located along the main highway connecting Chinandega and Corinto Port Facilities  the most modern port in Nicaragua. By highway, the port is 8.5 nm southwest of El Regate.

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### **Villanueva Military Barracks Area**

35. (S/D) Villanueva Military Barracks Area (Figure 15) was under construction in a sparsely populated area 25 nm northeast of Chinandega and 10 nm southeast of the Honduran border. Construction is estimated to have begun in March or April 1980. The facility currently consists of five barracks; seven probable barracks; one probable headquarters/administration building; one vehicle/equipment shed; two 10-bay, double-width vehicle/equipment sheds; one possible classroom building; one vehicle/equipment maintenance building; 14 support buildings; and a water reservoir. Future construction was indicated by the many cleared areas. Training areas include a Soviet-style type A obstacle course; a physical training area; an artillery miniature range; a firing range; and an occupied AA site. Extensive clearing and grading indicated the construction of additional training areas. Although far from complete, the facility is occupied and well secured. The area containing the buildings is completely fence enclosed with a guard tower at each corner; guardposts and barricades are at the main entrance, at a side entrance, and at the road to the occupied AA site; the water reservoir is separately fence enclosed; and a guardpost is at the turnoff from the main highway, 1 nm west of the facility. These security measures are undoubtedly related to the proximity of Villanueva to the Honduran border.

36. (S/D) Military equipment and weapons observed included six ZPU-4 guns, at least six probable trucks in the vehicle/equipment sheds, and one probable antitank gun.

### **Matagalpa Military Barracks Area**

37. (S/D) Matagalpa Military Barracks Area (Figure 16) was under construction 4 nm southwest of Matagalpa and 50 nm east of Villanueva Military Barracks Area, which is strikingly similar in configuration. Tree and brush clearing at the Matagalpa site was observed in mid-April 1980. The facility currently consists of five barracks; seven probable barracks, two of which are under construction; one probable headquarters/administration building; two vehicle/equipment sheds; one probable classroom building; 11 support buildings; and a water reservoir. One probable vehicle/equipment maintenance building and two small support buildings were in the midstage of construction. A firing range was the only training facility under construction; however, the pattern of the cleared areas indicated future construction of training areas similar to those at Villanueva.

38. (S/D) No military equipment or weapons have been observed at Matagalpa nor have any security measures been taken, possibly because Matagalpa is some distance (50 nm) from the Honduran border.

39. (S/D) The distinctive configurations of the Villanueva Military Barracks Area and of Matagalpa Military Barracks Area were strikingly similar not only to one another but to one of the newer areas at Managua Barracks and School  in Cuba (Figure 17). Rectangular training, barracks, and vehicle/equipment areas are common to all three facilities, and these areas are discretely placed.

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### **Condega Military Camp**

40. (S/D) Condega Military Camp (Figure 18) was under construction 15 nm north of Esteli and 18 nm west of the Honduran border. Construction is estimated to have begun in April or May 1980. The facility consists of six probable barracks, two large vehicle/equipment sheds and footings for a third, nine support buildings, two guardposts at the main entrance, and an occupied AA site. Training facilities included a Soviet-style type A obstacle course; a physical training area; an artillery miniature range; and a firing range.

41. (S/D) Six ZPU-4 guns have been observed at Condega. In late December 1980, five probable W-50 trucks, three of which were towing probable field guns, were in convoy at the southeast edge of the facility.

42. (S/D) Condega is similar in configuration to the facilities at Villanueva and Matagalpa, and the type and number of units housed at each facility will undoubtedly be similar as well.

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### Ocotal Military Camp

43. (S/D) Ocotal Military Camp (Figure 19) is on the north edge of Ocotal, 8 nm from the Honduran border. In mid-July 1979, shortly before the collapse of the National Guard, this area appeared to have no military association; however, by December 1979 the letters FSLN could be seen painted on the ground, and grading had begun. By [ ] a few support buildings had been added to the existing buildings, guardposts were placed on either side of the main entrance, and the letters FSLN had been replaced with EPS. Cuban/Soviet influence was first indicated in early July 1980 when a Soviet-style type A obstacle course was identified. By mid-October, a vertical radiator (probably a medium-frequency transmitter) and associated control building had been added at the north end of the area.

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44. (S/D) The facility consists of an L-shaped probable barracks, two probable headquarters/administration buildings, a three-section vehicle/equipment shed, six support buildings, one support building under construction, and a concrete-slab parade ground, part of which doubles as a basketball court. The facility is irregular in appearance because of the rugged terrain in which it is located. Numerous trenches and defensive positions have been dug throughout the facility. Personnel have been observed, but no military weapons or equipment have been seen.

### Puerto Cabezas Airfield and Military Camp

45. (S/D) Puerto Cabezas Airfield and Military Camp (Figure 20) are on the Caribbean coast of northeast Nicaragua in a sparsely populated, geographically isolated, undeveloped area. The facilities, formerly occupied by the National Guard, consist of an approximately 2,000-meter packed-earth runway and a military barracks and training area adjacent to the north end of the runway.

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46. (S/D) Improvements to the airfield began in April 1980, when grading on the runway was observed. Although the length of the runway was not increased, the surface was improved and a road across the runway was rerouted around the north end. An aircraft parking area and terminal/support building remained essentially unchanged. By June 1980, a Soviet-style type A obstacle course was under construction in one of several cleared areas at the military camp, and the perimeter fence around the facility had been changed and improved. By the end of July, two large vehicle/equipment sheds were under construction on the west side of the camp, and one support building was under construction on the east side near a road from the runway. In early December, defensive trenches were being dug in this area. Large cleared areas indicate future construction.

47. (S/D) Military equipment and weapons observed include W-50 trucks and Staghound armored cars at the camp and, since late November 1980, four light AA guns near the runway.

48. (S/D) The most commonly observed aircraft were C-47 and to a lesser extent C-46; many are regularly scheduled commercial flights and are virtually the only reliable means of transportation to this part of the country. Other aircraft types observed included Casa Aviocar, DC-6, Skymaster, S-58 and UH-1 helicopters, Aerocommander, twin-engine Cessnas, and small straight-wing aircraft. On one occasion, [REDACTED] a Cubana Britannia was observed at the airfield. A Cubana Britannia, probably the same aircraft, was observed on [REDACTED] at Sandino Airfield in Managua.

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49. (S/D) On two occasions an unusually high number of aircraft were observed. On [REDACTED] three C-47 and two Casa Aviocar were present, and on [REDACTED] two C-47, one C-46, and one Casa were present. By [REDACTED] one C-47 had departed and one DC-6 had arrived. The reason for this increased activity was not known; however, it might be speculated that the July activity was related to the transport of personnel and perhaps equipment to Managua for the anniversary celebration.

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## REFERENCES

### IMAGERY

(TSR) All applicable [REDACTED] was used in the preparation of this report.

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### MAPS OR CHARTS

TPC. Sheets K-25B and K-25C, scale 1:500,000 (UNCLASSIFIED)

### DOCUMENTS

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4. DIA. DIADIN 2-2E, *Nicaragua: Airfield (U)*, 2 Jan 81 (SECRET)

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(S) Comments and queries regarding this report are welcome. They may be directed to [REDACTED] Third World Forces Division, Imagery Exploitation Group, NPIC, [REDACTED]

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(S) This report was coordinated with DB-5D2, DIA. Contributions were made by [REDACTED]

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